

## Epistemic Internalism and the Challenge from Testimony

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**Abstract** In this paper, I spell out a new challenge for epistemic internalism that emerges out of the current debate on testimonial justification. Based on recent developments within this debate, one might argue as follows: Epistemic internalism can't account for the justification of our testimony-based beliefs, because (1) we should conceive of testimonial justification along anti-reductionist lines and (2) anti-reductionism is incompatible with epistemic internalism. In response to this challenge, I show that, despite initial appearances, epistemic internalism and anti-reductionism are compatible after all. Therefore, being an anti-reductionist with regard to testimonial justification doesn't force one to reject epistemic internalism. In order to argue for this result, I will make use of resources provided by speech act theory.

**Keywords:** Internalism, Externalism, Testimony, Telling, Assurance, Assertion

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### 0. Introduction

According to epistemic internalism (henceforth: internalism) the following holds: «(In) A person X is justified to believe a proposition p at time t, iff at t X has reflective access to sufficiently strong reasons for believing that p is true<sup>1</sup>».

In contrast to this, epistemic externalism (henceforth: externalism) claims that: «(Ex) A person X can be justified to believe a proposition p at time t, even if at t X doesn't have reflective access to sufficiently strong reasons for believing that p is true».

According to reliabilism, arguably the most popular form of externalism, X is justified to believe that p at t, iff p is the output of a reliable belief-forming process (or processes). Reliability is in turn defined by the amount of true beliefs that a given process produces. Plausible candidates for reliable belief-forming processes are perception, memory or introspection. However, according to reliabilism, it is not necessary that a person has reflective access to the reasons speaking in favor of the truth of her beliefs. Reliabilists only demand that a person is not aware of defeating counter-evidence speaking against the truth of her beliefs (cf. Goldman 1979).

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to, and to ultimately repudiate, a new challenge for internalism that emerges from the debate concerning the justification of

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<sup>1</sup> Following this definition, I am going to understand internalism as *access internalism* in this paper (cf. e.g. Bonjour 1985: 2003). According to this definition, it is crucial that one has reflective access to the reasons speaking in favor of one's beliefs.

our testimony-based beliefs (TBBs)<sup>2</sup>. Based on current developments within this debate, one might argue as follows:

1. Any plausible theory of justification has to be able to account for the justification of our TBBs;
2. Internalism can't account for the justification of our TBBs;
3. Therefore, internalism isn't a plausible theory of justification.

Premise (1) seems plausible to me. After all, a great many of our beliefs originate in the words of others. To deny that we can get justified beliefs and knowledge from testimony would therefore amount to claiming that we have far less justified beliefs and far less knowledge than we commonly take ourselves to have. This seems deeply unattractive.

Therefore, I am going to focus on premise (2) for the rest of this paper. First, I am going to give an overview over the main positions within the testimony debate – reductionism and anti-reductionism. And I am going to use this overview as a backdrop for spelling out the challenge from testimony in more detail (section 1). Then I am going to show that a view often called “the assurance view” in the literature is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. Hence, the assurance view allows the internalist to respond to the challenge from testimony (section 2). However, it is also pointed out that this response relies on some rather controversial assumptions. Therefore, a somewhat less controversial alternative to the assurance view – called “the assertion view” – is presented (section 3) and defended against its most pressing objections (section 4). While the assurance view and the assertion view are quite different, they both put the speech act by which information is conveyed center-stage. Finally, things are wrapped up with a brief conclusion (section 5).

## 1. Internalism and the Testimony Debate

One of the main questions in the contemporary testimony debate is: under which conditions are we epistemically justified to believe that what other people tell us is true? Traditionally, the answer has either been reductionist or anti-reductionist. Either our justification reduces to non-testimonial reasons, or we have a presumptive, though defeasible, right to believe what we are told. In this section, I'll look at how both reductionism and anti-reductionism relate to the internalism/externalism-debate. This will allow me to spell out the challenge from testimony the internalist has to face.

According to reductionism, testimony is epistemically neutral. That is, the fact that someone claimed that *p* is, in and of itself, no reason to believe that *p* is true. Therefore, the justification for our TBBs has to be ultimately reducible to other epistemic sources – such as perception, memory and inference. Non-testimonial reasons are necessary for the justification of our TBBs. Let's assume I ask a stranger for the time. Upon hearing her words, I remember that people have proven trustworthy with regard to this kind of information in the past. This in turn justifies me to believe my interlocutor now, provided I don't have stronger reasons to doubt her sincerity or competence<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For a different challenge for internalism that emerges out of the testimony debate see Wright (2016). Wright invites us to imagine two hearers, A and B, who both have identical internally accessible reasons for believing their interlocutors. However, A's interlocutor is in fact reliable while B's is not. According to Wright, this leads to an intuitive difference with regard to the justification of A's and B's TBBs – a difference that can't be captured by internalism. In response to Wright, Madison (2016) argues that the difference between A and B should be spelled out in terms of knowledge rather than in terms of justification.

<sup>3</sup> For defenders of different versions of reductionism cf. e.g. Hume (1748/1999), Fricker (1994, 1995), Van Cleve (2006).

Reductionism lends itself quite naturally to internalism. After all, reductionism holds that one needs to have some reflective access to the reasons that speak in favour of the truth of one's TBBs.<sup>4</sup> As long as we understand testimonial justification along reductionist lines, testimony doesn't pose a problem for internalism.

However, it has to be stressed that reductionist theories of testimonial justification have been severely criticized in the recent debate<sup>5</sup>. This has led more and more philosophers to abandon reductionism in favour of anti-reductionism. As Jennifer Lackey puts it: «Non-reductionism is the most widely accepted view of testimonial knowledge (justification/warrant) in the current literature» (Lackey 2008: 155).

In contrast to reductionism, anti-reductionism holds that testimony is not epistemically neutral. Rather, testimony has its own distinct epistemic force. Here, it is on par with memory, perception and introspection. Hence, we are *prima facie* justified to believe what we are told. Non-testimonial reasons are not necessary for the justification of our TBBs<sup>6</sup>. Again, the time-example can be used for the purpose of illustration: Let's assume I ask a stranger for the time. According to anti-reductionism, I am justified to believe what I am told, as long as I am not faced with defeating counterevidence – e.g. I notice that my interlocutor doesn't wear a watch or that the time told is incompatible with the position of the sun<sup>7</sup>.

Unlike reductionism, anti-reductionism is typically linked to externalism. Duncan Pritchard goes so far as to claim: «[I]t is often just taken for granted that a credulist thesis [anti-reductionism] is tied, whether explicitly or implicitly, to an externalist epistemology» (Pritchard 2004: 340)<sup>8</sup>. This outline of the dialectical situation puts me in a position to spell out the challenge for internalism that emerges out of the current testimony debate. More precisely, it allows me to state why philosophers might hold premise (2) of the initial argument. Again: «Internalism cannot account for the justification of our TBBs».

As pointed out in this section, anti-reductionism is the most popular theory of testimonial justification. And anti-reductionism is typically linked to an externalist understanding of justification. From this we get the following sub-argument for premise (2):

- (i) We need an anti-reductionist account of testimonial justification.
- (ii) Anti-reductionism is incompatible with internalism.
- (iii) Therefore, premise (2) holds.

In order to defend internalism against this challenge from testimony, one needs to show that (i) or (ii) is false. If one could convincingly show that we should understand testimonial justification along reductionist lines, this would be happy news for the internalist. However, such a defense of reductionism is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, I am going to use the next section to argue that, despite initial appearances,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Faulkner (2011: 10).

<sup>5</sup> It is common in the literature to differentiate between “global reductionism” – traditionally traced back to David Hume – and “local reductionism” – introduced by Elisabeth Fricker (1994, 1995). For criticisms of global reductionism see, for example, Coady (1992), Stevenson (1993), Fricker (1995) and Lackey (2008). And for criticisms of local reductionism see, for example, Insole (2000), Weiner (2003) and Gelfert (2009, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> For different versions of anti-reductionism cf. e.g. Reid (1785/2002), Coady (1992), Burge (1993) and Foley (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Anti-reductionists typically don't hold that one needs to actively look for defeaters. Rather, one just needs to be counterfactually sensitive to their presence (cf. Goldberg and Henderson, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For different versions of anti-reductionism that naturally lend themselves to externalism cf. Coady (1992), Burge (1993), Goldman (1999) and Goldberg (2010a).

internalism and anti-reductionism are compatible after all. This in turn will rob premise (2) of its motivation.

## 2. Internalism and Anti-Reductionism I: The Assurance View

So far, I have looked at standard versions of both reductionism and anti-reductionism. One criticism that has been levelled against both approaches is that it misses what is distinctive about gaining justified beliefs (and knowledge) through testimony. That is, in the case of testimony we receive information from a fellow human being who tries to establish a certain relationship with us in virtue of her speech act. We have to turn our eye to this speech act, and the relationship the speaker seeks to establish in virtue of it, in order to understand how we can get justified beliefs and knowledge from someone else's say-so<sup>9</sup>.

What I want to suggest here is that this view allows for a way of squaring anti-reductionism and internalism. In order to see how this is possible, we need to take a closer look at the speech act that is used by the speaker to convey information to her addressee. According to Edward Hinchman, information is paradigmatically conveyed by the speech act of "telling". In telling the hearer something, the speaker invites the hearer to trust her with regard to the truth of the content of her utterance (cf. Hinchman 2005: 582)<sup>10</sup>. In analysing this invitation further, Hinchman says: «S tells A that p (sincerely) iff A recognizes that S, in asserting that p» intends:

- (i) that A gain access to a prima facie entitlement to believe that p;
- (ii) that A recognize S's (i)-intention;
- (iii) that A gain access to the entitlement to believe that p as a direct result of A's recognition of S's (i)- intention. (Hinchman, 2005: 587).

The speaker tells the hearer something with the intention of giving the hearer a reason to believe what he has been told. Moreover, the speaker intends that her first intention is recognized by the hearer. And finally, the speaker intends that it is the hearer's understanding of the speaker's first intention that prompts the hearer to believe what he has been told.

Similar considerations with regard to the speech act of telling<sup>11</sup> are presented by Richard Moran:

The speaker intends not just that the recognition of his intention play a role in producing the belief that P, but that the particular role this recognition should play is that of showing the speaker to be *assuming responsibility* for the status of his utterance as a reason to believe that P (Moran 2005: 16, italics mine).

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Welbourne (1981), Ross (1986), Hinchman (2005, 2013, 2014), Moran (2005, 2013, 2018), Faulkner (2007, 2011), McMyler (2007, 2011, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> To avoid confusion, I will use "she" to refer to the speaker and "he" to refer to the hearer.

<sup>11</sup> Both Hinchman and Moran contrast the speech act of "telling" with the speech act of "asserting". What is distinctive about telling, according to Hinchman and Moran, is that the speaker addresses her speech act to the hearer. In doing so, she wants to make available a reason to believe the content of her speech act to said hearer. In contrast to this, Hinchman and Moran take asserting to be a speech act in virtue of which the speaker expresses her belief that things are a certain way in the presence of some hearer. However, the speaker does not necessarily address the hearer with her speech act. And she doesn't necessarily intend to make a reason to believe the content of her speech act available to the hearer (cf. Hinchman 2005: 563, Moran 2005: 8 – also cf. Moran 2013, 2018).

Here, Moran specifies what the speaker does in telling the hearer something: She intends to give the hearer a reason to believe what he is told. And, in intending to give the hearer a reason to believe what he is told, the speaker assumes responsibility for the truth of her words towards the hearer. Moran calls this assumption of responsibility undertaken in the act of telling “assurance”<sup>12</sup>. Picking up on Moran’s terminology, I will call the view outlined here “the assurance view of testimony” – or “the assurance view” for short<sup>13</sup>.

In what follows, I am going to argue that the assurance view is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. Let’s look at one conjunct at a time. To see why the assurance view is anti-reductionist in nature, it is helpful to look at the speaker’s side of the equation. According to the view presented here, the speaker assumes responsibility for the truth of the content of her utterance towards the hearer. And the speaker intends for the hearer to recognize that she does this and to believe her on this basis. This, in and of itself, shall be enough to make it *prima facie* epistemically reasonable for the hearer to believe what he has been told. No further, reductive, that is non-testimonial, reasons are necessary. Hence, we have an anti-reductionist account of testimonial justification<sup>14</sup>.

To see why the assurance view is internalist in nature, it is helpful to look at the hearer’s side of the equation. As stressed in the last paragraph, the speaker intends to make a reason available to the hearer. The hearer in turn acquires this reason if he understands the speaker’s intention correctly and, moreover, takes her up on her offer. As the hearer acquires this reason in virtue of understanding the speaker, this reason is, by definition, *reflectively accessible* to the hearer. Hence, the hearer is justified to believe what he is told in an internalist sense<sup>15</sup>.

Let us briefly take stock: It has been shown that the assurance view is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. Therefore, despite initial appearances, anti-reductionism and internalism are compatible. This means that premise (ii) of the sub-argument is false. And as premise (ii) is necessary for the sub-argument to function as a basis for premise (2) of the main argument, we have found a response to the challenge that testimonial justification poses for internalism.

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<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of illustration Moran writes: «[W]hen someone tells me it’s cold out, I don’t simply gain an awareness of his beliefs; I am also given his assurance that it’s cold. [...]. When someone gives me his assurance that it’s cold he explicitly assumes a certain responsibility for what I believe» (Moran 2005: 6).

<sup>13</sup> In using this terminology, I follow e.g. Moran (2005) and Schmitt (2010). Lackey (2008: cp. 8) speaks of “the interpersonal view of testimony”.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hinchman (2005: 562) and McMyler (2007: 511). However, it has to be pointed out that Moran (2005) and Faulkner (2007) present their versions of what is called “the assurance view” in this paper as an alternative to both reductionism and anti-reductionism. Their reason for doing so is that they take anti-reductionist positions to explain the hearer’s justification by reference to some general principle (cf. e.g. Coady 1992, Burge 1993) and not by reference to the relationship between speaker and hearer that is established by the speech act of telling. I follow Hinchman and McMyler, rather than Moran and Faulkner, because I take anti-reductionism to hold that (i) testimony has its distinct epistemic force and that therefore (ii) no non-testimonial reasons are necessary for one to be *prima facie* justified in one’s TBBs (cf. section 1). As pointed out above, the assurance view fulfils both (i) and (ii).

<sup>15</sup> Moran’s view contains both internalist and externalist elements (although he doesn’t explicitly reference the internalism/externalism-debate). In order to be in the position to properly invite the hearer’s trust, according to Moran, the speaker must fulfil certain “background conditions” – e.g. possess knowledge, be trustworthy, be reliable (cf. Moran 2005: 16). However, the inclusion of such background conditions on the speaker is potentially problematic for Moran’s view. Lackey (2008: 232 ff.) points out that it is unclear whether it is the speaker inviting the hearer’s trust, or the speaker in fact fulfilling certain background conditions, that explains how the hearer can get a justified TBB.

Yet, it has to be pointed out, that this response to the challenge from testimony relies on a rather controversial theory of testimonial justification. As emphasized above, the speaker invites the hearer's trust in the very act of telling. And she wants to be believed because the hearer accepts this invitation. This means that the speaker doesn't want her act of telling that *p* to be taken as some observable behavior from which the (likely) truth of *p* can be inferred. She doesn't want her utterance to be taken as evidence: «One who tells offers an invitation to trust, not an invitation to consider evidence of her worthiness of trust» (Hinchman 2005: 582).

However, proponents of the assurance view still want to allow that this non-evidential trust-based reason can be defeated by evidence:

Trust is a source of epistemic warrant just when it is epistemically reasonable.  
Trust is epistemically reasonable when the thing trusted is worthy of the trust – as long as there is no evidence available that it is untrustworthy (*ivi*: 578).

This is to avoid the charge of gullibility<sup>16</sup>. Surely, we are not justified to trust just anyone, no matter what.

This of course raises the question of how it is possible to weigh our evidential reasons against our trust-based reasons. How is it possible to compare reasons that are different in kind<sup>17</sup>? If this turns out to be impossible, then the assurance view wouldn't be able to coherently incorporate a no-undefeated-defeater-condition into its framework. This in turn would mean that it isn't a viable option in the epistemology of testimony.

Moreover, the assurance view holds that the speaker only makes the trust-based reason available to the hearer who is addressed by her. Only he gets told something and is thereby invited to trust her. Therefore, only he can take her up on this invitation. Mere eaves-droppers might also be justified to believe the speaker<sup>18</sup>. They might, for example, be justified to believe her because they possess relevant background information about her reliability on the question at issue. But they can't be justified to believe the speaker in virtue of her assurance<sup>19</sup>.

Following this distinction, the assurance view has to show that there is a real, epistemically significant, difference between addressees and mere eaves-droppers. Here is a list of suggestions<sup>20</sup>:

- Only the addressee, but not a mere eaves-dropper, has the right to complain towards the speaker should she say something false (cf. Moran 2005: 22);
- Only the addressee, but not a mere eaves-dropper, has the right to challenge the speaker and to demand reasons from her (cf. Hinchman 2005: 586);
- Only the addressee, but not a mere eaves-dropper, has the right to refer to his original informant when passing on the information to a third party (cf. Hinchman 2005: 586, McMyler 2013: 1064 ff.).

However, in each case, it has been argued that the alleged difference between addressee and eaves-dropper doesn't exist or, if it does, isn't epistemically significant. Jennifer Lackey (2008: cp. 8) has argued that addressees and eaves-droppers alike can have the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Fricker (1994).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lackey (2008: 225 f.).

<sup>18</sup> I am using the term "eaves-dropper" in a broad sense. It is meant to cover both accidental listeners as well as people who are secretly listening in on a conversation.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. Hinchman (2005), Moran (2005), McMyler (2007, 2011, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> For a similar list see Nickel (2012: 312).

right to complain towards the speaker. Miranda Fricker (2012) has responded that addressee and eaves-dropper are different in so far as they are entitled to different sorts of complaints. However, she concedes that this difference is moral, rather than epistemic, in kind. Additionally, Lackey (2008: cp. 8) has argued that eaves-droppers can also have the right to challenge the speaker and to demand reasons from her. And Sanford Goldberg (2011) and Philip Nickel (2013) have both argued that eaves-droppers can also have the right to defer to their original source of information when passing on the information they received to a third party. Therefore, it is controversial that there is a relevant epistemic difference between addressees and eaves-droppers.

My aim here wasn't to show that the assurance view isn't a viable candidate in the epistemology of testimony. Rather, I just wanted to stress that it relies on controversial assumptions. This in turn means that a response to the challenge from testimony that draws on the assurance view, is bound to be controversial as well. Therefore, I am going to use the next section to present what I take to be a less controversial response. That is, an internalist version of anti-reductionism that doesn't rely on non-evidential reasons and that doesn't posit an epistemic difference between addressees and eaves-droppers. While the resulting view will be quite different from the assurance view, it will also put the speech act by which information is conveyed center-stage.

### 3. Internalism and Reductionism II: The Assertion View

In order to work out the account hinted at above it will be helpful to return to Richard Moran. In developing his version of the assurance view, Moran does not only look at the speech act of "telling". He also looks at the speech act of "assertion"<sup>21</sup>: «Determining his utterance as an assertion is what gets the speaker's words in the realm of epistemic assessment in the first place» (Moran 2005: 16). Only after determining that the speaker's words were in fact intended as an assertion does it make sense to assess these words from an epistemic perspective. That is, to ask questions like "Is it true?" or "Does she know what she is talking about?". Such inquiries would be beside the point when dealing with questions, orders or expletives.

In what follows, I am going to argue that a closer look at the speech act of assertion will give us what we need for an account of testimonial justification that is both internalist and anti-reductionist in nature. We can take our first cue from John Searle: «[T]he proposition is presented as representing an actual state of affairs» (Searle 1969: 64). In asserting something, the speaker makes a claim about how things are – e.g. "It is raining outside", "There is beer in the fridge", "*Richard III* is a play by Shakespeare". This is why the question "Is it true?" is appropriate here.

But this is not all. The speaker doesn't just make a claim about how things are. In doing so, she also commits herself to having proper backing for her claim. That is, she commits herself to fulfilling an epistemic norm. In its most general form, this norm can be spelled out as follows: «(EN) Only assert that p when you are in the epistemic position to assert that p<sup>22</sup>».

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<sup>21</sup> On the difference between "telling" and "asserting", according to Hinchman and Moran, cf. fn. 11.

<sup>22</sup> To my knowledge, the current debate about an epistemic norm of assertion originates in Williamson (1996, 2000) (Williamson defends a knowledge norm of assertion – see below). Following Williamson, it is widely accepted in the literature that asserting properly is tied to the fulfilment of an epistemic norm. However, philosophers disagree about what this norm requires. Arguably, the most popular candidates for what it means to be in the epistemic position to properly assert that p are the knowledge norm: Only assert that p when you know p to be true (see e.g. Williamson 1996, 2000; DeRose 2002; Hawthorne 2004; Stanley 2005; Hawthorne and Stanley 2008). And the evidence norm: Only assert that p when you

This is why the question “Does she know what she is talking about?” is appropriate in connection with assertions.

These two factors – representing the content of one’s utterance as true and, in doing so, undertaking an epistemic commitment – are characteristic for the speech act of assertion. And these two factors, I am going to argue, allow us to develop an account of testimonial justification that is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. As in the last section, let’s look at one conjunct at a time.

Again, I am going to start by considering the speaker’s side of the coin. In making an assertion, the speaker claims that the content of her utterance is true. And she further represents herself as being in the epistemic position to make such a claim. Otherwise she wouldn’t make a straight-out assertion. Rather, she would qualify her words with expressions like “I guess”, “I am not sure”, “Maybe” or “You should really ask someone else”. Therefore, the fact that she is willing to make an assertion, in and of itself, gives the hearer a *prima facie* reason for his TBB. This reason is anti-reductionist as it is provided by the speaker in virtue of her assertion. No additional non-testimonial reasons above and beyond are necessary<sup>23</sup>.

To see why the account presented here is internalist in nature, it is again helpful to turn to the hearer’s side of the coin. The hearer acquires the reason provided to him by the speaker in virtue of correctly understanding the assertion *qua* assertion. He understands that the speaker represents the content of her utterance as true and that, in doing so, she undertakes an epistemic commitment. And acquiring this reason in virtue of understanding the speaker’s utterance correctly means, by definition, that this reason is reflectively accessible to him.

That we do in fact have an, at least rough<sup>24</sup>, understanding of these factors, characteristic of assertoric speech, is backed by empirical studies. A study by Rakoczy and Tomasello (2009) shows that children as young as three understand that assertions, as opposed to imperatives, aim at truth. In the case of assertions, they criticize the speaker if she says something wrong. In the case of imperatives, however, they criticise the hearer if he fails to do as he is told<sup>25</sup>. And a further study by Markus Kneer (2018) shows that adults judge that a speaker doesn’t have the right to make an assertion if she merely believes what she asserts, without possessing sufficient epistemic reasons to back up said belief.

Like the assurance view, the assertion view is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. Therefore, the assertion view, like the assurance view, is able to respond to the challenge from testimony that anti-reductionism poses for internalist theories of justification. But in how far might the assertion view be less controversial than the assurance view?

In order to answer this question, I will now revisit the two features of the assurance view that made it controversial to begin with. Firstly, the assurance view proved

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have strong evidence that *p* is true (see e.g. Pritchard 2005; Douven 2006; Lackey 2007, 2008; Lawlor 2013). I won’t take sides on this issue.

<sup>23</sup> I’ll defend this proposal against objections in the next section. For now, I am concerned with presenting the broad outline of the assertion view.

<sup>24</sup> What I mean here is that the hearer doesn’t necessarily need to consciously entertain propositions like «In making an assertion the speaker commits herself to honouring such and such epistemic standards». Rather, he has an implicit understanding of what the speaker does in making an assertion – an understanding that might become more explicit upon reflection or due to Socratic questioning (cf. Goldberg 2011: 184 fn. 16).

<sup>25</sup> Rakoczy and Tomasello (2009) talk of young children understanding the “direction of fit” of different speech acts.



controversial because it claimed that the reasons provided by testimony were non-evidential in nature. This made it difficult to see how it could coherently incorporate a no-undefeated-defeater-condition into its framework. In contrast to this, the assertion view makes no claims about testimonial reasons being non-evidential. Rather, the assertion view suggests conceiving of testimony as evidence. As the speaker represents the contents of her utterance as true and, in doing so, undertakes an epistemic commitment, the fact that she is willing to assert that *p* indicates that *p* is true – just like smoke indicates fire. And as the assertion view conceives of testimony as evidence, it can incorporate a no-undefeated-defeater-condition into its framework without problem.

Secondly, the assurance view claimed that there is an epistemically significant difference between addressees and mere eaves-droppers. However, it proved difficult to find a suitable candidate for spelling out this difference. Here, it has to be emphasised that the assertion view makes no claims about an epistemic difference between addressees and eaves-droppers. To the contrary, as pointed out before, the epistemic force of assertoric speech is explained by reference to it aiming at truth and the speaker undertaking an epistemic commitment. These are perfectly general features of assertion. They don't depend on whether one is addressed directly or whether one is a mere eaves-dropper. Therefore, they provide the same reasons to any hearer independent from his relationship to the speaker<sup>26</sup>. Consequently, the challenge of spelling out an epistemically significant difference between an addressee and an eaves-dropper doesn't arise for the assertion view<sup>27</sup>.

In this section, I have done three things: (1) In presenting the assertion view, I have provided an alternative to the assurance view. (2) I have argued that the assertion view is both anti-reductionist and internalist in nature. Hence, I have given a response to the challenge from testimony. And (3) I have given two reasons for why the assertion view might be less controversial than the assurance view. This, however, doesn't mean that

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, the assertion view allows for there being circumstantial differences between addressees and eaves-droppers. It might be prudential for an eaves-dropper not to challenge the speaker so as not to reveal his presence. However, circumstantial considerations might also prevent an addressee from issuing challenges – e.g. he doesn't want to offend. The important point to stress here is that circumstantial considerations can affect addressees as well as eaves-droppers. Therefore, they are independent from the relation one has to the speaker qua speaker – cf. Nickel (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Views similar to what I'm calling "the assertion view" have been presented in the literature, though not in the context of resolving a tension between internalism and anti-reductionism. Ross (1986) also holds that one is *prima facie* justified to believe what one is told in virtue of understanding the speaker's assertion as an assertion. But, unlike me, Ross holds that this justificatory reason is non-evidential in nature. And Hinchman writes that the aim of someone asserting that *p* is «to inform possible interlocutors that *p*, thereby enabling them to know that *p*» (2013: 617). However, in a later paper he claims that «only an addressee, and not any overhearer, can be reasonable in *simply* relying – that is, relying simply and solely – on the speaker's closure-conductive reliability» (Hinchman 2014: 39). A plausible way to interpret this passage is for it to claim that only someone directly addressed by the speaker can be *prima facie* justified to believe that *p* simply in virtue of the speaker's say-so. Overhearers would need additional reasons – maybe background information about the speaker's reliability – for them to be *prima facie* justified to believe that *p*. In contrast to this, the assertion view holds that the speaker's assertion, in and of itself, provides addressees and overhearers alike with an equally good *prima facie* justification to believe that *p*. Moreover, Goldberg (2011) and Pelling (2013) also stress the epistemic significance EN possesses for recipients of testimony. Yet, unlike the view presented above, they both remain neutral on the question whether referring to EN (and the hearer's rough understanding of EN) is sufficient to explain how a hearer can get a *prima facie* justified TBB, or whether reductive reasons are a necessary part of such an explanation. (For more on the epistemic significance of assertoric speech also cf. Goldberg 2015a, 2015b).

the assertion view is free of problems. Therefore, I shall use the next section to address what I take to be the two most pressing objections against the assertion view.

#### 4. Objections against the Assertion View

In this section I am going to address the following worries: (1) The assertion view is not a version of anti-reductionism. Rather, it is a version of reductionism in disguise. (2) Even if the assertion view is genuinely anti-reductionist in nature, it can't explain how we can acquire *prima facie* justified beliefs from the words of others. If objection (1) or (2) turns out to be unsurmountable for the assertion view, then it wouldn't be able to respond to the challenge for internalism that stems from the contemporary debate on testimonial justification.

So, why might one think that the assertion view is a version of reductionism in disguise? Well, according to the assertion view, the hearer is *prima facie* justified to believe what he is told because he understands that, in making an assertion, the speaker represents the content of her utterance as true and, in doing so, commits herself to upholding an epistemic norm. The hearer understands that the speaker represents herself as being in the epistemic position to back up her claim. But the hearer has this understanding in virtue of empirical background knowledge he possesses about the practice of making assertions. While growing up, he has learned that, in his language community, speakers have to meet certain epistemic requirements to assert properly. Thus, according to the assertion view, the hearer is justified to believe what he is told in virtue of reductionist reasons. Hence, that assertion view is really a version of reductionism.

I think that this objection conflates two things: (a) The hearer is justified to believe what he is told in virtue of reasons. (b) The hearer is justified to believe what he is told in virtue of reductive, that is non-testimonial, reasons. In what follows I am going to argue that, according to the assertion view, the hearer is justified to believe what he is told in virtue of reasons he possesses. However, these reasons are not reductive reasons. Therefore, the assertion view doesn't collapse into a version of reductionism<sup>28</sup>.

In order to spell out this difference, it is helpful to return to the characterization of reductionism that was given at the beginning of section 1. There it was said that the reductionist regards testimony as epistemically neutral. That is, the fact that someone claimed that *p* is, in and of itself, no reason to believe that *p* is true. Therefore, non-testimonial reasons are always necessary for the justification of our TBBs. This characterization was then illustrated by means of a someone asking a pedestrian for the time. While he listens to the pedestrian, he remembers that people have proven trustworthy with regard to this kind of information in the past. This in turn justifies him to believe the pedestrian now, when she tells him the time.

The reasons alluded to in the time-case are clearly reductive in nature. That is, they have nothing to do with the pedestrian telling him the time right now. Rather, he has them due to his past experiences. Whenever he was able to check the time for himself, he found his own observations to be in agreement with the information he had been given. The pedestrian's words might be his source of information. But the fact that the pedestrian told him something plays no role in justifying the resultant belief. Moreover,

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<sup>28</sup> Cf.: «Consider the possibility of an inferentialist anti-reductionism, according to which a testimonial belief is doxastically justified only if one forms one's beliefs on the basis of a defensible inference, but where the inference in question does not cite positive reasons for regarding the testimony as credible» (Goldberg 2010b: 141). However, Goldberg merely mentions a logical possibility here. He doesn't spell out what such an account would look like.

the reasons have to be reductive in the sense just outlined, because testimony itself it taken to be epistemically neutral.

In contrast, the reasons one possesses according to the assertion view are quite different. Following the latter, one possesses a reason for believing what one was told in virtue of correctly understanding the speaker's assertion. That is, one understands that, in making an assertion, the speaker commits herself to meeting certain epistemic standards. Put slightly differently, one's reason is *derived directly* from the fact that one understands that something was asserted. No reference to past experience, that has nothing to do with the testimony at issue, is cited to explain how the hearer can get a justified belief out of the exchange. Therefore, the reason under consideration here is non-reductive in nature. Consequently, the assertion view doesn't collapse into a version of reductionism.

Still, one might want to resist this conclusion. After all, in order to possess this reason, the hearer must – at some time in his life – have learned that asserting properly is tied to the fulfilment of an epistemic norm. Hence, the reason cited here is part of the hearer's body of empirical knowledge. Due to this, this reason is principally no different from the hearer's empirically founded belief concerning the reliability of people when it comes to time-telling.

I agree that we learn, and know, empirically that asserting properly is tied to the fulfilment of an epistemic norm. But it doesn't follow that this knowledge is not importantly different from knowing that people are generally reliable when they tell us the time. In the first case, we learn something about what an assertion is – a speech act in virtue of which the speaker commits herself to being in a certain epistemic position. If we come to (fully) understand what "assertion" means within our language community, then this will entail understanding that an assertion is tied to fulfilling an epistemic norm<sup>29</sup>. In the second case, however, the knowledge cited refers to a contingent fact. As it happens, our experience has taught us that people are generally reliable when they tell us the time. But it is conceivable that our experiences concerning the reliability of time-tellers would have been different. We can easily imagine people who have, by and large, made negative experiences when asking people for the time<sup>30</sup>.

Hence, the reason in the first case, unlike the second case, is not a reason extrinsic to the assertion by which testimony was given. Therefore, it not a reductive reason. Rather, it remains a reason provided by the testimony itself – a non-reductive reason. It's just that we need to learn empirically that this non-reductive reason is provided by the assertion.

Still, even if we agree that the assertion view is genuinely anti-reductionist, we might still wonder whether it can account for the justification of our TBBs. After all, it might seem problematic to simply assume that any given individual will comply with the epistemic norm of assertion. Philip Nickel says that: «From an epistemic point of view it might seem stupid to rely on presumed compliance with an epistemic norm or rule as a free-standing basis for forming a belief» (2013: 211). And Casey Johnson claims that: «[T]he constitutive norm of assertion neither guarantees nor makes it more likely that asserters stand in the appropriate epistemic relation to the content they assert» (2015: 360). As there is always the possibility that we will encounter a speaker who violates the norm of assertion, such a norm can't explain why we should be justified to believe any given speaker. What we need is additional reasons to believe that our interlocutor does in fact

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<sup>29</sup> This is comparable to learning that water is H<sub>2</sub>O (cf. Putnam 1975; Kripke 1980; Michaelian 2008).

<sup>30</sup> I mean this to be independent from whether we could have made the experience that testimony as a whole is, by and large, unreliable. On the latter point see Coady (1992).

act according to this norm. And such a requirement would lead to the assertion view collapsing into a version of reductionism.

However, I believe this objection misses the function that norms play in our everyday life. Think about norms of politeness – e.g. letting the other person finish her sentence before it's your turn to speak, not cutting in line at the cash-register, respecting someone's personal space. In each case, we don't need concrete reasons for believing that the other will act in accordance with those norms. It is our default to expect them to be upheld. This explains the surprise and the indignation we feel when someone violates these norms – "Wow, that was rude". Similarly, one should be able to assume that one's interlocutors act in accordance with the epistemic norm of assertion.

One might respond at this point that the epistemic norm of assertion is a special animal. While we are entitled to expect that the norms of politeness are upheld, we can't expect this in the case of assertions. In discussing testimonial justification, Paul Faulkner calls our attention to what he calls "The Cooperation Problem" (henceforth: CP). A hearer who asks for information has an interest in being told the truth. However, it would be best for the speaker «to receive an audience's trust and yet have the liberty to tell the truth or not given the shape of the speaker's interests on the occasion» (Faulkner, 2011, 6). And as this conflict of interest is a perfectly general feature of any testimonial exchange «[t]he acceptance of testimony must be backed by reasons for it to be reasonable» (Faulkner 2011: 6). It isn't enough to simply assume that the speaker will comply with the epistemic norm of assertion.

While I agree that the hearer's and the speaker's interests can clash, I don't believe that this is sufficient to establish the conclusion that one always needs additional reasons to believe that one's interlocutor will behave in a cooperative way. It seems frankly paranoid to always have to consider whether one's interlocutor might have a hidden agenda. Why, for example, should I need to wonder whether it is in my interlocutor's interest to deceive me, when I ask her for the time? The following seems more appropriate: One only needs further reasons to believe that one's interlocutor is following the norm of assertion if one has concrete reasons to believe that she has a motive to deceive. As Alvin Plantinga puts it: «I believe you when you tell me about your summer vacation, but not when you tout on television the marvellous virtues of the deodorant you have been hired to sell» (Plantinga 1993: 79).

This diagnosis is also applicable to the example Faulkner uses to motivate CP in the first place. Faulkner invites us to imagine a customer wanting to buy a used car. She wants to buy a reliable vehicle and would rather leave the lot empty-handed than to buy a defective car. In contrast to this, the used-car salesman has an interest in getting rid of a defective, and hence hard to sell, model. The customer knows this and therefore needs positive reasons to believe that the car on offer is in fact reliable<sup>31</sup>. Here, the hearer has concrete reasons for believing that the speaker might have an interest to deceive. And this explains why, intuitively, the hearer needs positive reasons for believing the speaker in this case. This, however, doesn't mean that the hearer also needs such reasons when the speaker has no apparent motive for deception.

This result is compatible with anti-reductionism. After all, according to anti-reductionism, one is only *prima facie* justified to believe what one is told. As pointed out in section 1, this justification can be defeated. The latter is the case when one has concrete reasons to believe that it might be in one's interlocutor's interest to speak deceptively. Here, one has defeating counterevidence. In order to restore justification, such a defeater calls for additional reasons that act as defeater-defeaters. In Plantinga's

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Faulkner (2011: 5).

advertising-case one would need additional reasons to believe that the actor wouldn't endorse a product she doesn't believe in. And in Faulkner's used-car-case one would need additional reasons to believe that the used-car salesman wouldn't try to sell a defective car.

Similar considerations apply to the norms of politeness as well. We are also only *prima facie* justified to believe that a given individual will comply with them. If, for example, we made the experience that Fred is frequently rude, then we will need additional reasons to believe that he won't act rudely on this occasion. We might know that it's the first time he is meeting his girlfriend's parents and he wants to make a good impression. The assertion-case, as well as the politeness-case, point to a general feature of the way that norms affect our everyday lives. Such norms afford us with a background of common expectations in front of which our social interactions can flourish. They are there precisely so that we don't always have to ask ourselves how the others will behave. If one always needed reasons for believing that a given norm is upheld, then this norm would be superfluous. We only have to enter into a more reflexive mode of assessment once we have concrete reasons to doubt that a certain norm is upheld in a given situation<sup>32</sup>. Consequently, we have no reason to assume that the reference to an epistemic norm of assertion should be insufficient to explain why we are *prima facie* justified to believe what we are told<sup>33</sup>.

In this section, I have responded to what I take to be the most pressing objections against the assertion view. I have argued that the assertion view isn't a version of reductionism in disguise. And I have argued that the norm of assertion is sufficient to explain why we should be *prima facie* justified to believe what we are told. Hence, I take the assertion view to be a viable response to the challenge from testimony for the internalist.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a new challenge for epistemic internalism that emerges out of the current debate on testimonial justification. If one follows the trend of conceiving of testimonial justification along anti-reductionist lines, then, on the face of it, it seems that internalism can't be a plausible theory of justification. However, against this, I have argued that internalism and anti-reductionism are compatible after all. To show this, I have presented two internalist versions of anti-reductionism – the assurance view and the assertion view –, drawing on the resources of speech act theory. Hence, one can be an internalist without thereby being committed to either reductionism or anti-reductionism in the epistemology of testimony<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Ross makes a similar point with regard to rules: «It is a quite general feature of rule-governed life that the responsibility for ensuring that one's actions conform to the rules lies primarily with oneself and that others are in consequence entitled to assume, in the absence of definite reasons for supposing otherwise, that one's actions do so conform» (Ross 1986: 77). Arguably, rules mainly differ from norms in so far as the former are typically more explicit than the latter.

<sup>33</sup> Also cf. Bräuer (2018: 12 ff.).

<sup>34</sup> This paper has benefitted significantly from comments by an anonymous reviewer – thank you!

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